



PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE:
Resource Management Planning for BLM Lands in
Beaverhead and Madison Counties, Montana



The Dillon Field Office of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management is starting a process to develop a resource management plan (RMP) for the public lands and resources it manages in Beaverhead and Madison counties in southwest Montana. The RMP will guide the BLM in making management decisions for these lands and resources. The plan will highlight management goals and objectives and establish standards, guidelines, and procedures for managing resource values and programs. It will specify what public and commercial uses are appropriate, where they are appropriate, and under what conditions. We will also prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) to accompany the planning document.

We are at the very beginning of this process. Your thoughts and concerns are particularly important now in helping shape the plan. We are interested in knowing what issues you think the plan should address and what sideboards should be used to guide development of the plan (called planning criteria). We also want to hear your comments regarding areas of critical environmental concern (ACECs) and if there are

streams in the planning area you think should be reviewed under the Wild and Scenic River Act.

Even if you do not wish to comment at this time, you must return the business reply mailing sheet at the back of this brochure in order to stay on our mailing list for this project. If we do not hear from you, we will remove your name from our mailing list so we do not continue sending you unwanted information in regard to the Dillon RMP. If you are interested in the future management of public lands administered by the Dillon Field Office, we invite you to become involved and lend your voice as we begin to develop the RMP process.

WHY WE NEED AN RMP

We need to develop an RMP because the existing management framework plan—approved in 1979—does not address several concerns that have surfaced since it was adopted. The face of the West is changing, and we now see a diversity of users and

uses which were not present when the last plan was approved. We’ve also identified emerging issues and management concerns related to threatened and endangered species, changes in the intensity of use of certain resources, off-highway vehicle designations, and the need to address findings for lands nominated as ACECs. Finally, the BLM has updated its planning and resource program guidelines at the national level to ensure all values are considered in decisions about the management of public lands. These new guidelines need to be incorporated into the Dillon RMP.

THE PLANNING AREA

The BLM Dillon Field Office manages most of the public land in Beaverhead County and all the public land in Madison County. This includes about 902,528 acres of surface estate and 1,305,504 acres of subsurface mineral estate. The BLM’s Butte Field Office manages about 59,287 acres of public land located south of the Big Hole River in the extreme northern end of Beaverhead County which will not be addressed in this plan.

THE RMP/EIS PLANNING PROCESS

Preparing the RMP is a nine-step process (see box). Some steps occur at the same time and it may be necessary to repeat a step as additional information becomes available. The RMP which results from this process helps field managers make decisions and guides staff efforts on a day-to-day basis. Where more detailed management direction is required, we will prepare and analyze activity plans after the comprehensive plan is completed.

STEPS IN THE PROCESS

1. Identify Issues

2. Develop Planning Criteria

3. Compile Inventory Data and Information

4. Analyze the Management Situation

5. Formulate Alternatives

6. Estimate Effects

7. Select a Preferred Alternative

a. Draft EIS

b. Final EIS

8. Issue Record of Decision

9. Implement, Monitor, and Evaluate

we are here

ISSUES

Many resource values and programs will be addressed in the RMP. The major issues we have identified so far include: 1) managing vegetation, especially sagebrush-steppe habitats, 2) watershed management, particularly regarding water quality, fishery values, and riparian areas, 3) managing areas with

special values, for instance, ACECs, 4) conservation and recovery of special status species, which includes threatened, endangered, and sensitive plants, animals and fish, 5) travel management and access to public lands, 6) availability and management of public lands for commercial uses, and 7) land tenure adjustments, such as areas suitable for land exchanges or other actions.

We are interested in your views on these issues as well as thoughts you may have regarding other issues or concerns. Once we have had a chance to review your comments and suggestions, we will provide feedback to you on what we’ve decided should be used to guide the plan and why.

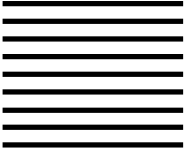
PLANNING CRITERIA

Planning criteria are the guidelines and constraints we follow when developing the plan. They help us focus the planning process on the issues and help to avoid unnecessary data collection and analyses. We are asking for your suggestions regarding criteria or “sideboards” that you think are important. Again, once we have reviewed your suggestions, we will provide feedback to explain how your ideas shaped the planning criteria.

AREAS OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN (ACECS)

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) directs the BLM to use the planning process to “give priority to the designation and protection of areas of critical environmental concern”. In past planning efforts, several areas were proposed as ACECs but were never evaluated. These include the Madison River corridor, the Virginia City historic district, the Axolotl Lakes area, the Block Mountain area, the Upper Centennial Basin bald eagle nesting areas, the Sage Creek area, Lima Reservoir area, the Muddy Creek/Big Sheep Creek area, Everson Creek, Badger Gulch, Bannack historic district, the Centennial Mountains from Nemesis Mountain to Price Creek, Clark Canyon, Maiden Rock, the East Fork of Blacktail Deer Creek, and the ferruginous hawk nesting area. The Soap Gulch-Camp Creek area and the Jerry Johnson Creek area were previously nominated but are now administered by the BLM’s Butte Field Office and will not be considered in the Dillon planning effort.

We want to know if there are other areas that need to be evaluated under the ACEC criteria. To be considered a potential ACEC, an area must meet the criteria of relevance and importance as established and defined in 43 CFR 1610.7-2. Nominations must include descriptive materials, detailed maps, and evidence supporting the “relevance” and “importance” of the resource or area. We will evaluate existing and new ACEC nominations during development of the plan. Please contact the Dillon Field Office for more information on nominating ACECs.



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WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS

During the RMP process, we will review streams in the planning area for eligibility and suitability under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The eligibility phase consists of identifying streams that are free-flowing and possess outstandingly remarkable values. Rivers which meet these criteria are then classified as wild, scenic, or recreational. We will then then study the eligible streams to determine whether they are suitable for designation. Recommendations will regarding suitability will be made in the draft and final RMP documents, along with management strategies. Only Congress, however, has the ability to designate a stream under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

We want to know if there are particular streams in the planning area which we should review as we begin this planning process.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE	
8/9/2001	Notice of Intent Published in Federal Register
10/19/2001	Formal Scoping Period Ends
12/31/2001	Compile Inventory Information
2/15/2002	Complete Analysis of Management Situation
4/15/2002	Complete Alternative Formulation
9/15/2002	Complete Estimation of Effects
5/15/2003	Release Draft EIS--Begin 90 Day Formal Review
6/15/2004	Release Final EIS--Begin 30 Day Protest Period
2005	Issue Record of Decision

SCOPING MEETINGS	
Lima	Tuesday, September 25, 2001, 7-9 p.m. Multipurpose Room at the school
Dillon	Wednesday, September 26, 2001, 7-9 p.m. Search and Rescue Building
Sheridan	Thursday, September 27, 2001, 7-9 p.m. Bethany Hall
Butte	Monday, October 1, 2001, 7-9 p.m. BLM Butte Field Office Conference Room
Ennis	Tuesday, October 2, 2001, 7-9 p.m. Ennis Town Hall

HOW TO GET INVOLVED AND STAY INVOLVED

To stay on our mailing list, make sure you return the mailing sheet included in this brochure (cut out, re-fold in 1/2 and staple closed) to the BLM Dillon Field Office. No postage is needed. We will use the mailing list to keep you updated throughout the planning process. If you wish to withhold your name or address from public review or disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, you must state this prominently at the beginning of the comment section. Such requests will be honored to the extent allowed by law. IF WE DO NOT HEAR FROM YOU, WE WILL REMOVE YOUR NAME FROM THE LIST SO YOU DO NOT RECEIVE UNWANTED MAIL.

Check out our website at www.mt.blm.gov/dfo. We will post pertinent information there as we develop the plan.

Come to a scoping meeting to get additional background information and express your thoughts and concerns about the public land managed by the BLM’s Dillon Field Office. The meetings will be an open house format. Locations, dates and times are listed in this brochure.

Send us written comments either by regular mail or e-mail. Send regular mail to: Renee Johnson, RMP Project Leader, Bureau of Land Management, Dillon Field Office, 1005 Selway Drive, Dillon, Montana 59725. Send e-mail to MT_Dillon_RMP@blm.gov.

We need to receive written comments on issues, planning criteria, ACECs and Wild and Scenic Rivers by October 19, 2001, in order to give your comments full consideration as we move forward in this planning process.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact Renee Johnson, RMP Project Leader, at the BLM Dillon Field Office, (406) 683-8016.

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COMMENTS:

Issues:

Planning Criteria:

ACECs:

Wild and Scenic Rivers:

Other Comments: